1 FOREWORD

I live in the shadow of the Toronto Asylum, in Parkdale, Toronto's great ghetto for gays, blacks, paupers, psychiatric survivors, etc. The neighbourhood begins at the overpass for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, where King and Queen Streets symbolically descend a little, so as not to interfere with the trains. Joseph Workman, Medical Superintendent 1853-1875, the "Nestor of Alienists," fretted that the steepness would cause accidents. He also wanted the structure to be aesthetically pleasing, since it was so close to "his" grounds.[i]

What marked the boundary of the Asylum, now marks the beginning of Parkdale. The patients of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, the successor of the Toronto Asylum,[ii] rent the neighbourhood's old houses and apartment buildings, more or less out-patient boarding-homes, many of them fire-traps. Workman observed that asylum treatment was at least better than an auto-da-fe;[iii] occasionally it seems no different.

The following is a discussion of the writings of the patients, inmates, and principal alienists of the Toronto Asylum, circa 1840 to 1920, organized around such themes as the relationship between medical authority and authorship, the textuality of disease, and the meanings of asylum.

My principal thesis is that doctors in rather self-interested ways constructed medical authority as authors, by troping the asylum and its diseases until, thanks to the perceived failure of things like "moral therapy," and professional self-interest, they "virtually" troped it out of existence. I describe this troping in the doctors' own texts, focused on the Toronto Asylum, because of its paradigmatic, long and troubled history. In the process I have probably